

Air Force focuses on three priorities

Amidst fighting the global war on terror, the Air Force remains focused on its top three priorities. Air Force Chief of Staff General T. Michael Moseley said the service is concerned primarily with fighting and winning the long war against global terrorism and militant extremism, taking care of our Airmen and their families, and the overall recapitalization and modernization of aging, obsolete air and spacecraft.

The global war on terror began after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center towers in New York, and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. But the Air Force has been engaged in continuous battle for much longer than the recent conflict.

"We've been doing this in the Arabian Gulf since August of 1990," he said. "The Air Force has never left the Middle East. It's critical for us all to understand the following: the Air Force has been in continual combat since that time – 16 straight years through Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Northern Watch, Southern Watch, Vigilant Warrior, Desert Fox, and now Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

"In fact, we've been fighting in Afghanistan 14 months longer than the United States fought World War II," he said. "While conducting these Middle East operations, the Air Force also conducted simultaneous combat ops in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo and over Serbia. No other component or service can say that.

"Out of all this continued combat experience comes an incredible wealth of training, deployment, rotation, expeditionary and true combat lessons learned

and an opportunity to capture things that work, reject things that don't work, and take those things on board in a programmatic and fielding sense – to ensure we're providing the most modern and most combat effective training

and equipment possible," the general said. "And we are doing this while we are transforming, while fighting a global war, and while operating the oldest inventory of aircraft in the Air Force's history."

As the service continues to be engaged in the global war on terror, it is changing the way it develops and trains Airmen, so they are better prepared to fight, and so the service delivers a better prepared force to combatant commanders. Those changes begin in basic training.

"Every new Airman now gets a rifle, every new Airman will qualify with that weapon, and every new Airman will soon qualify with a pistol," he said. "We are looking at what it takes to better prepare our people to operate in an expeditionary Air Force engaged in a global war on terrorism that will likely last a generation, and that's a huge set of challenges and opportunities for us."

That also means changing occupational training. In coming years, many career fields will be consolidated, resulting in Airmen with a broader set of skills, and technical schools will put a new emphasis on warrior skills.

"We will focus the technical schools on expeditionary skills, and focus the technical schools on what our new Airmen need to learn," he said. "These Airmen will have to be prepared to fight across all spectrums of

conflict. That's our job."

Also of concern is the requirement to recapitalize its fleet of aging, obsolete aircraft and spacecraft.

"As the Air Force executes its annual budget authority and develops its long term programs the money is divided into one of four general areas; personnel, operations/maintenance, infrastructure/MILCON and investments," General Moseley said. "In the past the investment accounts or the seed corn to recapitalize and modernize has taken a back seat.

"That is exactly why we are operating the oldest inventory of aircraft and spacecraft in the history of the Air Force," he said. "When I put this uniform on, as a cadet at Texas A&M University, the average age of the Air Force aircraft inventory was a little over eight years. That average age today is 24 and a half years."

The service is on track today to replace its fleet of aging KC-135 Stratotanker aircraft, but no tanker replacement has been selected. Once a selection is made, the general expects the last KC-135R will still be around for an additional 30 plus years as the new aircraft are delivered.

"The Airman that flies or crews that last KC-135R has likely not been born yet. In fact, the mom of that Airman may not have been born yet," he said. "This is the cycle we must break."

Another issue is maintaining the older aircraft the Air Force would like to retire. Congressional legislation has precluded the service from retiring aircraft it no longer needs. These Congressional restrictions on retiring obsolete aircraft include the C-5, KC-135E, C-130E, F-117A, U-2 and the B-52.

"The annual cost to maintain those aging aircraft increases as the aircraft get older," the general said. "And, as the threat continues to evolve, these older aircraft become less combat capable and certainly less survivable. To help us turn this trend around we are working hard with the various committees, staff and members on the Hill to provide relief from the restrictive language, and we're now seeing some support."

General Moseley believes the Air Force needs the flexibility to manage its own inventory as it pursues its massive modernization program.

"Our recapitalization efforts are both monumental and critical for us to be able to defend the nation and provide the Joint

Team with air, space, and cyberspace dominance," he said. "Although we make it look easy, it's not. The air and space dominance we've guaranteed our ground and maritime forces for more than 50 years requires incredibly hard work from our Airmen, who deserve cutting-edge equipment to meet the challenges of the 21st Century."

Those challenges begin with warfighting, but do not end there. General Moseley expects to be engaged around the world in an array of operations that demand Airmen and their equipment be more adaptive, more responsive and more expeditionary than ever.

"Our modernized inventory will complement the training initiatives we're pursuing for the nearly 700,000 active duty Airmen, Reservists, Guardsman and civilians in the Air Force," he said. "Our Airmen are national treasures. It's amazing what they make possible and we owe it to them to ensure their success."

— Staff Sgt. C. Todd Lopez

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by Tech. Sgt. Cecilio M. Ricardo Jr.



by Tech. Sgt. Ben Blocker



by Senior Airman Brian Ferguson



by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Pomery

